

September 11, 1957

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MEMORANDUM

TO: CHAIRMAN, WORKING GROUP I

FROM: Defense Member

SUBJECT: U.K. Thermo-Nuclear (Trade Control) Concept

1. Problem

It has been recently reported by the U.S. Embassy, London, that the U.K. will propose, at an early date, a revised Sino-Soviet trade control list based on a "thermo-nuclear war concept." In view of the work program approved by the CFEP calling for a review of the current controls on east-west trade, with the objective of proposing "new international control measures and to revitalise the security concepts underlying the controls," it is important that the nature of the United Kingdom's concept be explored promptly.

2. Background

Although intimations of a new approach had previously been received, it was not until shortly after the Summit Conference in the summer of 1955, that the British made known to the U.S. in bi-laterals in London, their view of a "new look" for multilateral controls. The philosophy behind the British reasoning is quoted:

"Nowadays when the military recognized the devastating power of thermo-nuclear weapons and planned in terms of wars of short duration and nearly total destruction of industrial objectives with the initial attack and retaliation, the controls aimed at limiting the acquisition of conventional weapons and of preventing the build-up of the industrial base necessary to support a long-drawn-out war on a global scale, seemed to have even less purpose than had previously been the case. Furthermore, when it was the British judgment that the present controls were of very limited marginal importance in terms of weakening the ability of the Soviet Bloc to wage a war with conventional weapons, it was hard to rebut the case that the present control lists were of even less significance against the new concepts."

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In further elaboration, the British continued

"As a general indication of the conclusions towards which they were moving it might be noted that in place of the present criteria for listing items, the British military were, in terms of strictly defense requirements, testing the listing of individual commodities against the consideration of whether their continued control would significantly limit the initial readiness of a potential aggressor to launch an attack with thermo-nuclear weapons or effectively limit the defense of the Soviet Bloc against retaliatory attack of the same sort from the West. Where an item was in the list at present primarily to hamper industrial development useful to the ability of the Bloc to wage conventional war for a long period on a global scale, it would be the British view on the basis of its new concept that such an item should no longer be retained."

In response to a query as to the possibility of limited localized wars being fought with conventional weapons, the British replied that

"the Soviet Bloc had adequate capacity and stocks of conventional weapons so as to be completely beyond the reach of Western controls, which, on the most optimistic appraisal, had had no effect on the Soviet's military capacity Nonetheless, the British would not propose, in the implementation of their new concept, to remove conventional weapons from the list, or machinery so specialized as to be useful only for producing such weapons or ammunition, or items incorporating advanced military know-how."

It was further stated that, "It was too early to say what changes the British would have to suggest in the control lists, as the matter had not been fully considered by the Ministers," but that "they not only envisaged one list applicable to the entire Communist World, . . . but they also contemplated a reduction in the European control list." "In the United Kingdom's view there was no doubt that a substantial reduction in the International Lists was desirable and strategically justifiable in the new circumstances, i.e., Nuclear weapons combined with long-distance delivery capacity render concept denial non-military material Sovbloc increasingly obsolete."

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Under U.K. leadership the "one list (international) applicable to the entire Communist World" was achieved by the recent elimination of the China differential. The substantial reduction in the International Lists is next on their agenda.

Britain has adopted the position that "controls on East-West trade should be confined to items of strategic importance and should not be used as a weapon of economic warfare." The U.K. stated that the following considerations should be taken into account when deciding on the removal or addition of items to the Lists:

- a. That the Bloc was, or was becoming, self-sufficient, or produced enough of a particular commodity to be able to satisfy its military needs without difficulty;
- b. That though an item made some contribution to military potential, it was of a general-purpose character and was used for military purposes on a small scale in proportion to its civilian use.
- c. That an item served the basic economy of a country and was not closely enough related to military production to justify embargo."

3. Discussion

With regard to trade control the British view in part appears to stem from an undue fear concerning the term "economic warfare". Admittedly, this is a difficult term to define, and it is even more difficult to draw a line of demarcation between "economic warfare" and "economic defense." As it is merely a difference of degree in severity of the sanctions used, trade control - short of a blockade - may be conceived as falling within the purview of national security interest during periods of "cold war" without regard to precise strategic/non-strategic divisions. It will be noted the term, "cold war", is a relative newcomer and there is no body of opinion or interpretation in international law as to what nations might or might not do under such conditions. It would appear that Britain's reticence to use "economic warfare" may be a rationalization of its reluctance to hold back the commercial pressures in that country for trade with the Communist countries.

The major powers of the free world are committed to a policy of collective free-world security. Individuals having a predominant interest either in military or commercial matters can possibly be criticized for frequently underestimating the value of this collective arrangements to their respective national security and to the sacrifices that are involved.

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It would be indefensible to maintain that the technological advances should not affect composition of effective international security trade controls. There can be no questioning the fact that atomic weaponry has had far-reaching impact on strategy and concept in recent years. The important thing is that as strategy continues to develop, it must be based on clearly detailed consideration of all factors involved. For example:

- a. Basically Free World strategy which recognizes the requirements of collective security are different from those which formulated national and military strategy in the past. The basic threat to security is clearly posed by the hostile policies and power, including the growing nuclear power, of the Sino-Soviet bloc, with its dynamic and aggressive Communist ideology and international apparatus.
- b. It is agreed that both the East and West possess the capability to wage an all-out atomic war world-wide. This type of war is considered to have the least probability of occurrence due to the mutually catastrophic effects. Any increase in nuclear capability by either country would tend to diminish further the probability of general war initiated by an all-out atomic attack.
- c. Soviet military doctrine emphasizes that nuclear weapons do not diminish the decisive importance of ground forces, fleets and aviation and that without well-organized logistic support of these forces it is impossible to wage modern war successfully.

General war will remain a possibility. In general war, regardless of the manner of initiation, atomic weapons will be used from the outset. It is now envisioned that a general war would consist of two phases; an initial phase of comparatively short duration and a subsequent phase of indeterminate duration. The ultimate strategy adopted, as well as the duration and outcome of the subsequent phase, will depend largely on the relative advantage achieved in the initial phase and the remaining relative war potential of the opposing sides.

Thus the minimum objectives during the initial phase would consist of the protection of vital areas and facilities to insure the initiative capability, and freedom of action necessary for subsequent operations; the infliction of such damage on bases and facilities supporting atomic attacks; and lastly the breakdown of the basic logistic structure which provides the sinews of war to the enemy forces.

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The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation grew out of a recognition of the military threat posed by the Sino-Soviet bloc. Free nations, agreeing on both the presence and character of this threat, formally joined forces for collective military defense. The U.S. and its NATO allies are continuously reviewing the world situation. Therefore, the competence to assess the security implications of nuclear warfare developments would seem clearly to be with NATO. The conclusion drawn by the United Kingdom regarding the impact of nuclear weapons on the efficacy of strategic trade controls cannot be reconciled with known strategic planning. NATO should speak directly to this problem for the benefit of the COCOM/CHINCOM organization.

5. Recommendations:

In view of the persistent reference by the UK to a nuclear "new look" for multilateral trade controls, it is important that this concept should be resolved promptly. In view of this urgency, therefore, it is recommended:

First: That representatives of competent agencies of the U.S. Government arrange, through the Department of State, to meet with representatives of the competent agencies of the UK government, including its Ministry of Defense, for the purpose of discussing the military and technical aspects of the UK's Thermo-Nuclear Concept, in order to determine its applicability to strategic trade controls, and

Second: That the U.S. take the initiative and propose to NATO that it consider the Thermo-Nuclear Concept for the purpose of advising COCOM regarding the military aspect of such a concept relative to strategic trade controls.